

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Epiphany 3 -- January 24th and 27th, 2013

Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Dear brothers and sisters,

One of the new innovations in movies is seeing a movie in 3D. It is that feeling of things coming right at you that has made this so exciting. It makes you seem more involved in the movie. What if we had 3D in church? That way when I point my finger during the sermon each person in the congregation could see it coming down larger-than-life on them. Of course, this is not going to happen, but do you think we might benefit from something that would make the preaching of this congregation more personal, so that every listener would always know that the words aren't just directed at someone else, but that he's preaching to me? That this same sermon would be just as relevant, just as worthwhile, just as necessary if I were the only one in church? What God says in the Bible isn't just directed at everyone else. He's speaking to you.

But, of course, you don't need 3D technology and a finger in your face in order to realize that. All you need is a pair of ears. All you need to do is listen. Imagine yourself listening to a sermon 2000 years ago in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. There's a guest preacher, but you know him well. His name is Jesus. You watched him grow up in the house of Mary and Joseph. Now he's one of the local craftsmen. Lately you've heard news about him going on a preaching tour through the region and he's gotten good reviews. Today he's preaching in his hometown. He opens the scroll of Isaiah and turns to the same exact passage we heard in the First Lesson: **The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.** Then he sits down to deliver the sermon and everyone's eyes are glued on him. **And he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

It's been called the shortest sermon ever preached. It's quite possible the sermon included more than that. But whether or not he went on, just that one sentence was sufficient. God promised you a Savior. Here I am! Would you have believed him? You could certainly have come up with a million reasons not to. He says he comes from God but I know he comes from just down the street. He says he is the fulfillment of Isaiah but I can remember not too long ago he was studying Isaiah. He talks about setting prisoners free and giving blind people sight and poor people hope but I know him and he's not a politician or a doctor. He's just a carpenter. Imagine yourself sitting in that synagogue 2000 years ago in Nazareth. Would you have believed him?

Or you can stop imagining what you would have done had you been there and just listen to Jesus say it now. After all, he didn't just say it to someone else. He says it to you: God promised you a Savior. Here I am! Do you believe him?

Maybe you can come up with a million reasons not to: He says he comes from God but based on my past I'm pretty sure God's not my biggest fan. He says he is the fulfillment of God's promises but I can't remember the last time God kept a promise to me. He talks about setting prisoners free and giving blind people sight and poor people hope but I'll believe it when I see it and I sure don't see it and I sure don't feel it now. But whether or not you believe it, Jesus still says it and it's still true: God promised you a Savior. Here I am! And right now he is allowing those words to ring in your ears so that you might believe them without an ounce of doubt. So there's nothing better that you could be doing right now than listening to Jesus as if he's preaching just to you: God promised you a Savior. Here I am!

Theme: Jesus Preaches A Message Of Salvation

- 1. A Salvation for the poor, captive, blind and oppressed**
- 2. A Salvation that comes from Jesus alone**

1. For the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed

One reason Jesus could keep his sermon so short was that the words he read from Isaiah were already his words. Isaiah wasn't writing about himself when he wrote, **The Spirit of the Lord is on me.** The Son of God was using Isaiah's pen to talk about himself. In other words, the one who preached the sermon in Nazareth in about 27 AD was the same one who had authored the sermon text in about 700 BC. The Spirit of the Lord was on Jesus. He visibly descended on him in the form of a dove at his baptism to show that Jesus was sent from God and he invisibly went with Jesus thereafter as he carried out the work God sent him to do.

And what was the work God sent him to do? To preach salvation. More specifically, to preach salvation for those who needed it most. Look at his words about the poor and prisoners and blind and oppressed and it sounds a lot like the people of Haiti. Things are not looking good for Haiti. It is one of the most third-world nation in the Americas; some ninety-percent of its people living in poverty. And however much aid has been poured into it over the last decades, nothing seemed to be doing much good. And then there were the hurricanes and earthquakes? Here we are a couple of years later, and it hurts to watch the news. Someone on television was asked if he thought the United States was doing enough to help. He responded that it could never be enough. Despite the best efforts of the world over the past couple of years, people are still suffering terribly and dying. It's not for lack of trying. It's just that bad. Many of the people are simply beyond help.

Do you have that image in your mind? That's the image Jesus uses to describe the people he came to save — people beyond help. He came to preach salvation for those who need it most. When you hear his words about the poor and prisoners and blind and oppressed, your mind might go to Haiti, but he's not just describing Haitians. It's you. It's me. People who are beyond help. Because even people with lots of money can be poor. Poor in a spiritual way, without a single thing to offer to earn God's favor. Because even people who have never spent a night in jail can still be prisoners. Prisoners in a spiritual way, held captive by a cycle of sin that they just can't stop and by the guilt of their sin that they just can't shake. Because even people with 20/20 vision can be blind. Blind in a spiritual way, stumbling down a path that leads to hell without even realizing they're headed in the wrong direction. Because even people who live in a land of freedom can be oppressed. Oppressed in a spiritual way, unable to break loose from the devil's grip and a slave to temptation — losing every time.

Jesus came to preach salvation for those who need it most. Do you realize without Jesus you're the spiritual equivalent of Haiti? Do you realize you need salvation? Not the kind of salvation that the Red

Cross and US military and half the world are scrambling to bring to hurricane and earthquake victims, but the kind that only Jesus can give from sin. Do you realize you desperately need it? Do you realize you are the poor, prisoner, blind, and oppressed that Jesus came to save? Then there could not possibly be any sweeter-sounding words to your ears than Jesus' one-sentence sermon: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

2. A Salvation that comes from Jesus alone

The words of Jesus bringing salvation mean everything, because that means you're saved. When Jesus preaches, the message is salvation. Not how to be saved, as if the recipe comes from him but the ingredients come from you. Jesus' words mean that you are saved — it's already done. The salvation Jesus preaches doesn't come from you; it comes from the Lord. God sent Jesus to save you and Jesus saved you. With Jesus, you don't stand in poverty before God with nothing to offer because Jesus has given you his perfect life as your own. With Jesus, you're not a prisoner to your own sin and sentenced to God's punishment because Jesus took your sins to his cross and paid their price. With Jesus, you're not stumbling blindly down the road that leads to hell because the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see how Jesus lived for you and now lives with you to lead you safely to heaven. With Jesus, you're not a slave to the devil; you're not a slave to temptation. With Jesus you're free.

That's why there could not possibly be any sweeter-sounding words to your ears than Jesus' one-sentence sermon: Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. It's done. You are forgiven. You're saved. You're free. You can look around yourself and come up with a million reasons why that can't be true, but then you're looking in the wrong direction. Look at Jesus. He doesn't just say it to everyone else. He says it to those who need it the most. He says it to those who feel it the least. He says it to the least likely candidates for God's favor, the ones beyond all help. He says it to you and me. God promised you a Savior. Here I am! It's done. When Jesus preaches, the message is salvation. Amen.